

Working Notes

**TOWN OF ROCKY HILL
SENIOR AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF MAY 19, 2014
-CORRECTED-**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas called the May 19, 2014 Senior Affairs Committee meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, Rocky Hill Town Hall, 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Those in attendance: Councilor Joe Kochanek and Councilor Frank Szeps, Denise Sanderson (Elderly Services Coordinator/Municipal Agent) and Cathy Sylvester (Senior Coordinator/Recreation Supervisor). Also present were; Lisa Zerio (Director of Parks and Recreation & Custodial Staff) and Various Seniors of R.H. (Rich Laria, Barbara Josephs, Marlene O'Leary, Melodie Perretto and Marilyn Swepson).

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked if there was anyone in the audience who wished to make a comment. No one from the audience wished to do this.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES & WORKING NOTES – MARCH'S MEETING

Councilor Frank Szeps made a motion to approve Minutes and Working Notes of the March 17, 2014 meeting of the Senior Affairs Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilor Joe Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

4. DISCUSSION ON LETTER SENT TO STATE REP. GUERRERA

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that she wanted to say for the record that a letter that was dated April 24, 2014 was sent to State Representative Tony Guerrero and this was signed by Mayor Henry Vassel. This was based on the discussion that this Committee had at their March meeting and she had brought this forward at the Town Council's April 7, 2014 meeting. They are asking State Representative Tony Guerrero to look into funding regarding engineering plans, site plans, and feasibility plans for a new Senior/Community Center. She told everyone that they just have to sit now and see where this goes. She wanted to make sure that they were aware of this and she told them that they will be kept posted as things are heard. Rich Laria asked if there has been any follow-up on this. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that this had just been sent out on April 24, 2014 and today is only May 19, 2014. Rich Laria said this has been almost one month and he asked if they know how long this will take before they get a response. Councilor Joe Kochanek said this could take two months and this is especially after the fact that they have been working on the State budget all of this time. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that maybe she will

give State Representative Tony Guerrero a call by the end of June to find out what the status is but she isn't expecting an answer any time soon. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas explained that this is the place that they were supposed to start. She brought this issue to the Town Council after this Committee had met and there was a unanimous vote at the Town Council for this to go forward. She thinks that Cathy Sylvester had reported at this Committee's meeting in March that they needed State Representative Tony Guerrero to look into grants. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she will follow-up on this but she doesn't want to be pushy. Rich Laria asked where they will go from here if they don't get this. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she would like to "cross that bridge when they get to it" because maybe State Representative Tony Guerrero can do something for them and she told everyone to think good thoughts.

Councilor Joe Kochanek thinks that for State Representative Tony Guerrero to do anything with that letter that he will have to get consensus from a few other people (at the State Capitol) with regards to this being a worthy cause first of all. The second thing is that a location has to be found to get this money. Councilor Joe Kochanek said this could even take three months. They have to find out where the grants are and if there is money or if the grants are all spoken for. They also have to find out if there is enough support for Rocky Hill to be granted money as opposed to Wethersfield for example.

Councilor Joe Kochanek referred to Rich Laria's question as to what they will do if Plan A fails and he said he really isn't too sure what their options are at this moment. Councilor Joe Kochanek said it has been pointed out that the seniors are looking for space and they are limited as to what they can do at this Community Center as far as space goes. Another addition can't be put onto the Community Center without more green space being provided. He mentioned a requirement that would be needed. He thinks it would be almost impossible to put an addition on. They had talked about other places they could go for this but he told the seniors that they have indicated that they wanted this Senior/Community Center close by the present building so they are kind of limited because of the restrictions. He asked Rich Laria what Plan B would be and he doesn't see where they can come up with one real quick because there are a whole bunch of requirements that they would have to come up with, as well as there are restrictions that are trying to be worked around.

Rich Laria said one of the things that they had discussed at this Committee's prior meeting was the feasibility of the Kennedy House. This is a piece of property that the Town owns. He told Councilor Joe Kochanek that he thought he was the one who had suggested that that might be an ideal location and he asked how they could move forward with that to see if it is feasible. Councilor Joe Kochanek said if they used that, they would need funding for architectural fees, etc. He explained that if they decided to develop that site that they would need money for the soft costs for them to get started with it. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said they are asking State Representative Tony Guerrero for a grant for the engineering concepts, site plans and feasibility plans and not for a grant for the entire Senior/Community Center to be built. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas mentioned that they have talked about other avenues like the Kennedy House or maybe for them to do something with the back of the Cora J. Belden Library, etc. She referred to what Councilor Joe Kochanek had said about giving State Representative Tony Guerrero time to see about this. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas explained some more. She said they feel that they are deserving of this but State Representative Tony Guerrero needs to be able to express this to

people as well. Rich Laria asked this Committee if it was okay with them if the seniors could follow up with State Representative Tony Guerrero and he said that he would be more than happy to make phone calls or write him a letter as a representative of the seniors. Councilor Joe Kochanek told Rich Laria as a citizen of this Town that he has a right to do whatever he wants with State Representative Tony Guerrero and he told him that he doesn't need this Committee's permission to do this. Councilor Joe Kochanek told Rich Laria that this Committee can't tell him to do this or not to do it.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told everyone again that they will be kept posted if anything is heard. She said that she is sure they will be seeing State Representative Tony Guerrero over the next few weeks so she will approach him to make sure that he is aware of the urgency of having this moved along.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked Councilor Frank Szeps if he had any comments or if he was good. Councilor Frank Szeps said he was good.

**5. REMINDER – RECENT SURVEYS SENT - PLANNING ON HAVING
WORKING SESSION- BEGIN TO WORK ON ESTABLISHING SENIOR
SURVEY**

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said since this Committee's first meeting in November of 2013 or December of 2013 that they have been talking about reaching out to the senior population. She said that Councilor Frank Szeps had brought this back to the age of 53 years old. They would do this by getting a survey out to people to not only find out what programs they want at a Senior Center but also to find out what their thoughts are about a Senior Center. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she knows that there are programs in Rocky Hill that people do take advantage of but she isn't sure if everyone is aware of them (i.e. for tax relief, etc.).

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she checked this Committee's Minutes from their last meeting and Councilor Frank Szeps had asked Cathy Sylvester for some information on the government mandates for Rocky Hill to provide for senior services. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked Cathy Sylvester if she had looked up anything with regards to this. Cathy Sylvester said she had checked with other Senior Centers and there are no specific mandates. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this wouldn't be as far as Senior Centers are concerned but as far as a Town providing senior programs to its residents. She said she didn't mean programs like bowling. Cathy Sylvester said to her knowledge, when she spoke to other Senior Coordinators that she found out that there are no specific mandates. She mentioned how there are no mandates for the Parks and Recreation Department that they have to have soccer for example. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said the point of the survey will be if they are meeting the needs of the senior population. There is a definite group that comes to the Town Hall to participate in those programs. She said that maybe people who are in their fifties are still working but they would like to know what programs are offered so that they can make plans. She then said this might be for people in their nineties too. She thinks it is important for them to do this survey.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she had asked for examples of surveys. She said that Denise Sanderson and Cathy Sylvester sent some. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said when she read

through the survey that Manchester had, there were a lot of words. Cathy Sylvester said this was for a future search and she said that they got a grant to do that. The grant was from the Hartford Foundation. She said that the people she contacted were people on a list that they were doing comparative studies with as far as sizes and for what they had for space, etc. Most of these people hadn't done any surveys in quite some time. Cathy Sylvester said Denise Sanderson had done one for the Community Center and it was just about programming. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that probably was more like the one from Bristol with regards to what programs the seniors wanted to have run at the Senior Center. Cathy Sylvester said right.

Councilor Joe Kochanek said there had been an interesting bit of dialogue in one of those about the changing age groups of participants at the Senior Center. Younger/older people are coming in. There was a conflict between the new people who were coming in and the people who were already there. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this was with regards to sharing. Councilor Joe Kochanek said this is very interesting and it is with regards to change. He explained some more. He then said as far as the mandates go that the question really wouldn't be mandates but this is what services should be provided to seniors. A lot of these had nurses who came in to take blood pressures, etc. which are needs for older people. He also referred to how socialization was spoken about amongst each other. It is healthy for people to socialize with other people instead of not communicating with someone for a week at a time. He thinks they should have a survey as to what the needs of the seniors are (i.e. social, food programs, recreational). Chairwoman Cathy Vargas mentioned financial programs.

Councilor Joe Kochanek mentioned how Wethersfield has a Senior Center Advisor. They have a green pamphlet and there are six different pages of services that they provide. They also have referral services that they provide. He gave more details about this. Cathy Sylvester said Wethersfield's Senior Center has a part time person and they don't have half of the programs that Rocky Hill has. She said that she didn't know what this brochure was. Councilor Joe Kochanek then mentioned how he had been visiting a lady this morning who had some issues and he tried to help her out. He said this lady had this pamphlet so he asked her why she didn't call people that were listed in it. This lady said she had called once before and she got the Senior Center Advisor. Cathy Sylvester said this is the same thing that Rocky Hill has. Councilor Joe Kochanek said he is sure that Rocky Hill provides these services too. He said there must be a bunch of things that seniors need that are already established and he said that every senior is the same as another senior basically. Cathy Sylvester said they are more or less and it depends on the population. Councilor Joe Kochanek said there are programs out there that Rocky Hill might want to incorporate if they saw what these are. Other Senior Centers might want to incorporate programs that Rocky Hill has. He explained that they shouldn't have to "reinvent the wheel" with a survey but they can do some research.

Cathy Sylvester said they have no space to do these programs in so this is why they are asking for a new building. She said they could do a survey though. Councilor Joe Kochanek said he was trying to get a handle on what they were talking about. This will be what it is that seniors want and need. Cathy Sylvester said they need to have people who are fifty-five years old and older being able to have a space with people who are ninety years old and older. She explained more. She said that she has been here for twenty-six years and she said that they can do a survey because they have done these before. She explained more and said the biggest problem they

have is space. This is from her working here, paying taxes in Town and from her seeing the surrounding communities. There are things they can't do now. Councilor Joe Kochanek said they have identified space and they are working on this. This is the reason that the letter to State Representative Tony Guerrero was sent out. Councilor Joe Kochanek said there had been a discussion at the beginning of this meeting and they know that space is needed. This has been established already and he thinks this is being worked on right now. He asked Cathy Sylvester if she thinks it is or not. Cathy Sylvester said she guesses it is. Councilor Joe Kochanek told Cathy Sylvester that he is getting the impression that she thinks he is asking her for a survey because he isn't interested in the space but he said they are very interested in the space and this is more so than she could imagine. This would be the answer to their problem.

Cathy Sylvester said that they have to tell her and Denise Sanderson what it is that they want to have put in a survey. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she was trying to figure out what Rich Laria had said. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said if they can't get any money and they have to pursue a referendum then she asked if they would have the support to do that. Approximately two hundred people use the Senior Center and this is out of a large population in Rocky Hill. If it can be shown through a survey that one thousand people would use a Senior Center or she said if five hundred people don't know that Rocky Hill has tax incentives to help the elderly then they have to "get on the stick". She wants to be able to let the Town Council know about a survey being done and that they have statistics. She said at one of this Committee's first meetings that she had mentioned that numbers do tell a lot. She can't go to the Town Council to say they are going to go out for a referendum if she doesn't have any statistics. Two hundred people wanting a Senior Center isn't going to work. She needs to be more comfortable that there are more people and the reason they aren't using the Senior Center is because there is no room. Cathy Sylvester said okay. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this is why they need a survey. She explained that she isn't just focusing on the Senior Center. She referred to what Councilor Joe Kochanek was saying about other things that seniors might like to have. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas thinks that socialization is a very important thing for seniors. She referred to the survey from Southington and she said that she likes the top part of it because it asks people to specify what age group they are in. They then have to check off how often they go to the Senior Center. She said this will be a telling thing if a lot of people state that they never go to the Senior Center.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she didn't know if the seniors in Rocky Hill have any newsletters and what their thought process is about that. She would also like to know how many seniors participate in the Senior Program for the schools. She has talked to Superintendent Dr. Mark Zito and this was also talked about by the Town Council during the budget workshops with regards to possibly having this expanded to having the seniors working for the Town. This would be another thing that they could find out from the seniors as to whether they would be interested in doing this.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said these are the kind of things that they need statistics on and she mentioned again that she can't go to the Town Council saying that a building is needed for two hundred people. She told them that she will be there to support this but she needs the backup for it.

Melodie Perretto referred to them having a survey and she asked if they could have one put online. She also asked if a few of the seniors could go on Rocky Hill Community TV to let people know that there is going to be a survey that will be looking towards the Town getting a Senior/Community Center. They need to know what the public would like in this Senior/Community Center. She mentioned that people might not even be aware that Rocky Hill has a Community Center. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this is the point. Melodie Perretto referred to the two things she just mentioned and about them reaching out like this because they can't solicit at apartment complexes, for example. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said they could also contact the *Hartford Courant* because one of their reporters is at the Town Council meetings so he could put an article in that newspaper about how there is going to be a survey. This survey could be picked up at the Parks and Recreation Department's office or it could be done online. She also said that this could be inserted into the *Rare Reminder*, which goes out to every citizen in Town. There are methods to get this information out to people in the most cost effective way. She said that she is looking for a listing of the issues that they will want input for before they get to that point. She thinks that Councilor Joe Kochanek has this starting in that direction so she said this is where she is going. Melodie Perretto said they can also state that the survey will be anonymous. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said they will only need to know the age group.

Councilor Joe Kochanek told Melodie Perretto that she can go to talk to the people at Rocky Hill Community TV to book a time and he said as long as they do this under an organization's name that it won't cost anything. Councilor Joe Kochanek said the *Rare Reminder* will put "small blips" in for nothing. Someone will have to put together something with little boxes to be checked off, etc. if this is going to be done online. The biggest cost for this will be the printing of these surveys that people will pick up to fill out. He then referred to a category as to whether people use the Senior Center and he said they should have people write down why they don't if they never use it. He said if there are one thousand five hundred people interested in going to a Senior/Community Center then that will be good but it won't be if only two hundred people are. He told them that they have to gather this information up and get it out to their constituents to tell them what they are trying to do here. He told the seniors to motivate those people to help them out. This is how they will get this done.

Cathy Sylvester said they need guidance and she said that the survey from Southington looks good. She told Councilor Joe Kochanek that he was right and people need to write down why they don't use a Senior Center if they are checking it off that they don't use it. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked them if they have ever seen surveys where if they are answering no then they would have to answer why. Cathy Sylvester referred to how Chairwoman Cathy Vargas had mentioned about if any of the seniors had any interest in any tax relief programs. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said yes and she said this would be like when Councilor Joe Kochanek had mentioned that there are social needs, medical needs and financial needs. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she would use the tax relief programs as a financial need. She doesn't know how many people are aware that these options are available and she explained some more. She also referred to if seniors want to work in the schools instead and she explained some more about that. Things like this she is interested in finding out.

Rich Laria asked if this Town has done resident surveys before because samples of these would help. It requires a fair amount of knowledge and information to put a survey together. He has

put business surveys together in the past. You have to make sure of what the goal is of the survey. You also have to make sure that they are valid and reliable, etc. He asked if they can go into the archives to see some surveys that have been given to the residents of Rocky Hill. Councilor Joe Kochanek said the last survey that he knows this Town had done on a Townwide basis was when they did one for the Plan of Conservation and Development. He gave more details about that. He told Rich Laria that he would say there really isn't anything that he could put his hand on right now but he told them that they have to look at themselves to see what they are trying to accomplish here, what they are trying to get, as well as how they are trying to get to this. He said they will then be able to jot questions down for the survey one right after another after they do that. He told the seniors that their goal will be the goal of this Committee and they will be able to help the seniors get there after they identify what it is.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told the seniors if they know someone who doesn't get out of their house to go to the Community Center or if they know someone who needs help from the Human Services Department but is too proud to get this information then these are the people who the survey needs to be given to. Denise Sanderson thinks that they should only stick with four topics for this survey. These should be education, financial, socialization and recreation. They could then come up with questions for each of these topics. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this sounds good.

Councilor Joe Kochanek asked everyone if they know how many programs are out there that people don't use because they don't even know about them. There is a program for almost everything. Denise Sanderson agreed but she said that the problem is that a lot of the seniors don't read and she said that she stresses this to them all of the time. Councilor Joe Kochanek said one of the goals that he thinks the Senior Center would do for people is to help them with problems they might have by referring them to someone who could help them. These people have to be guided in the right direction. He referred to the lady he had been talking to today and he said that she had five problems but he could only help her with three of these so he pointed her in the direction where she could get things done. He told everyone who was sitting there this evening that they were there because they care about the people who are out there and that they weren't there for themselves. He told them to think about what they want to do for the other people.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told Melodie Perretto when she had met with her way back that she thinks she is the President of one of the senior groups. Melodie Perretto said she is the Chairwoman of the Senior Task Force. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said maybe the Senior Task Force could sit there and brainstorm based on the four categories that Denise Sanderson came up with to figure out what kind of questions they would like to get out to the people they see at the Senior Center, as well as to the people who are outside to make them aware of what goes on at the Senior Center. She mentioned that there is no wrong answer when people brainstorm. They can put down on paper whatever they are thinking about. They can then look at this information and take out redundancy if there is some. This will be a starting point. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas referred to what Councilor Joe Kochanek had said about them being involved because they care and she told them that they would know about this more. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she is old enough to go to the Senior Center but she doesn't go because she doesn't have the time to seeing that she works. She told them that it would be nice for them to educate her as a

person who will hopefully be using the Senior Center in the future at some point in time. Cathy Sylvester asked Chairwoman Cathy Vargas if she would go in the evening to the Senior Center. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she is "flat out" now but she said you never know. She told them when they are meeting to figure out if maybe there should be some times in the evenings for the Senior Center to be open. She said this Committee is looking for guidance.

Melodie Perretto said she thinks evenings would be good for the seniors who are still able to drive. She thinks it would be nice to have an evening where the seniors could come out but she thinks this would probably be the young crowd. She explained some more. Marilyn Swepson said also that people who take care of their grandchildren during the day would like some relief and they would like to maybe do something in the evening. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told Melodie Perretto that she doesn't know when the Senior Task Force meets but maybe this is something that they can put on those agendas for a couple of their meetings. They can come up with a list and then they can reflect on it. Melodie Perretto said the Senior Task Force meets on the second Monday of each month. They don't meet in July or August though but she said they could still work something out between a few of them for those months. She said that she will talk to Marti Stiglich when they get to the point where they are going to release the survey because she has already spoken to her and she has no problem with a few of the seniors going on her TV program to speak about a Senior/Community Center. She then mentioned that maybe John Francis can see about putting the survey online. Melodie Perretto also mentioned the newspapers. She said maybe they can put this survey out in September. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that would be a goal.

Councilor Joe Kochanek told them that they have to realize that they will lose a half of a year if the Senior Task Force breaks for the summer and then doesn't start back up again until September. He explained that they will already be in next year's budget by the time they come back to this Committee and everything is "hashed out" to come up with a plan. Cathy Sylvester said they could have a Subcommittee for the Senior Task Force that can continue meeting over the summer. Councilor Joe Kochanek said if they can come back to this Committee with some meaningful information then they can make some meaningful decisions as to where they are going without having to go through another year. He suggested that they go to Channel 14 to see if they can do something for them and he asked if they know Mr. Haaglund. Cathy Sylvester said they do. Councilor Joe Kochanek said maybe they could do a telethon even.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this Committee is going to task the Senior Task Force with taking this on and starting in June. They can report to this Committee at their June meeting with regards to how they did so that they can be given an idea that they got going on this and that they have developed a Subcommittee, as well as that they will be able to provide this Committee with some information by August so that they can have the survey ready for distribution this September. Hopefully they will have something from State Representative Tony Guerrero by then. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told them that she thinks this Committee is looking to them. She asked Cathy Sylvester and Denise Sanderson if this is fair. Cathy Sylvester said yes. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked the seniors if this sounds like a plan. Melodie Perretto said yes and she said thank you.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked Councilor Frank Szeps if he had anything to add. Councilor Frank Szeps said he was supportive of this and he likes the direction they are going in. He likes putting the “ball in the court” of the seniors. Councilor Joe Kochanek told Councilor Frank Szeps that he is right because the seniors need to tell this Committee what they need.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told the seniors for them not to worry that the ideas they will be presenting might not be ready to go out as a survey because this Committee is looking for the wants and the needs that they have. It will then just be a matter of putting this into questions that can go out to people and that will be easy for them to answer. This Committee is looking for the ideas to come from the seniors. She asked them if they are good with all of this and they said yes.

Cathy Sylvester said she had one more question to ask in order to make sure that they are all clear. She confirmed that she and Denise Sanderson will move forward with the Senior Task Force, the Subcommittee and with Rich Laria. Cathy Sylvester said they will get questions ready and then they will show them to this Committee in June. They might have the final product by July but she said they are definitely going to shoot for a mailing, etc. in September. Councilor Joe Kochanek said they would be better off doing this in another couple of ways. One way would be to have this done electronically where someone can set a webpage up. He said this won't cost anything. The other way would be for them to have this printed out where people can pick the survey up at the Senior Center so that they can fill it out and drop it off. He said they don't want to do a mailing. Cathy Sylvester agreed but she said they are looking to have this survey put out in September. Councilor Joe Kochanek said they can use Channel 14 and the *Rare Reminder*. He said that they can use anything that is free. Cathy Sylvester said okay. Barbara Josephs thinks that the churches would be a good place to have these surveys. She said that in the church that she belongs to that they announce any social or medical needs there are so she thinks this would be a great place. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said they can also talk about the avenues of distribution at their Senior Task Force meetings so she said to make sure that they note churches. Councilor Joe Kochanek said if they go to any religious places in Town that he knows they would be happy to put this survey in their bulletins. This will be another way that they can get this out there for everybody.

Denise Sanderson asked the Committee if they want to approve this survey before it gets sent out. Councilor Joe Kochanek said no because he said this isn't this Committee's business. Councilor Frank Szeps said he will take a look at this. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said the survey will be provided to this Committee and they will go through this for content. Councilor Joe Kochanek guesses this Committee will look at this but they aren't going to tell them that they can't ask certain questions although they might suggest that they ask another type of question. He said this Committee isn't going to look to approve it because that would mean they could tell them not to do something. He told them that they can vet this. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told them to get their thoughts to this Committee and they will discuss those.

6. OTHER

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked if there was anything else to discuss. There was nothing else.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Frank Szeps made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:41 p.m. The motion was seconded by Councilor Joe Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo-Anne Booth
Recording Secretary